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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 000497

SIPDIS SIPDIS  
DEPT FOR SCA, DRL, AND INR  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019-04-13

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KCRM](#) [KIRF](#) [KISL](#) [KWMN](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: RECENT RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM  
CONVICTIONS

REF: TASHKENT 55, TASHKENT 56, TASHKENT 277

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Fitzmaurice, Poloff; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a meeting at the Embassy on March 30, independent human rights activist Ismoil Adilov handed over to poloff a collection of court documents from recent trials he had monitored involving suspected religious extremists. The documents demonstrate that at least six women were imprisoned for membership in the religious extremist group Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) in 2009, while at least ten other women were given suspended sentences on the same charges. Independent media outlets also reported that eight men were imprisoned for membership in the terrorist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), while three additional individuals were recently imprisoned for membership in the conservative Turkish religious group Nur. End summary.

SIX WOMEN IMPRISONED FOR HT MEMBERSHIP IN TASHKENT

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¶2. (U) According to court documents, on February 4, the Tashkent City Court sentenced three women - Mashkura Manapova, Shakhlo Sultanova, and Gulnora Hakimova - to six years' imprisonment for alleged membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT). Eight other women were convicted on the same charges, but were given three year suspended sentences and released.

¶3. (C) In December 2008, relatives reported to poloff that authorities had detained Shakhlo Sultanova and beat her and forced her to watch a pornographic movie. While police were reportedly attempting to elicit a confession from Shakhlo that her mother, Severa Sultanova, was a HT member, her mother eventually confessed that Shakhlo belonged to HT (ref A). The relatives also reported that approximately ten other women involved in the same case had

confessed that Shakhlo was a member of HT. The fate of Severa Sultanova is unknown.

¶4. (C) According to court documents, on December 28, 2008, the Tashkent City Prosecutor S. Alayev indicted three women for membership in the "women's wing" of HT: Rano Abzalova, Halida Nurmatova, and Dono Gulombekova. Adilov, who monitored their trial, reported that the women were eventually convicted and given one-year prison terms. According to Adilov, the women admitted in court reading the Koran, but denied that they were HT members. The principal evidence against the women reportedly was the testimony of three other individuals who had already been imprisoned for HT membership.

OTHER WOMEN GIVEN SUSPENDED SENTENCES, INDICTED

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¶5. (U) According to court documents, two other women were given suspended sentences for alleged HT membership in January. On January 7, the Tashkent City Criminal Court convicted two women - Mohira Mukhamedova and Robiabonu Mirzahmedova - for membership in the "women's wing" of HT. Mukhamedova was reportedly recruited into HT by her husband, who was sentenced for HT membership in

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¶1999. Until 2008, Mukhamedova allegedly recruited other women into HT in order to "overthrow the constitutional order and establish an Islamic Caliphate."

TWO WOMEN PROSECUTED FOR HT MEMBERSHIP IN SURKHUNDARYA

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¶6. (U) On April 7, the state-controlled "Ozbekiston Ovozi" newspaper reported that two sisters - Gulchehra and Gulbahor Makhmadiyorova - from the town of Denov in Surkhundarya province were prosecuted for membership in HT. During a search of their home, police allegedly found banned HT literature. The newspaper accused the women of failing to care for their families and "wasting their lives having become the victims of alien ideas." It noted that the women were "punished appropriately," but provided no further details.

¶7. (U) Over the past year, several other women have been prosecuted for HT membership in Denov. In 2008, state-controlled newspapers reported that five women from Denov district were imprisoned from three to six years for HT membership (ref B). It is unknown whether any of these cases are connected.

ACTIVIST SHARES HIS VIEW ON RECENT HT CASES INVOLVING WOMEN

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¶8. (C) During his meeting with poloff on March 30, Adilov shared his view on what is motivating the arrests. Noting that many of those recently arrested were women, he argued that this was because many male HT members have already been imprisoned over the years. He also observed that many of the women were wives or relatives of religious prisoners, which suggested to him that either the women

were actual HT members indoctrinated by their male relatives or they were easy targets for police to fabricate charges against them. In many cases, he noted that the principal evidence used against the accused was testimony from individuals who had already been imprisoned for HT membership.

¶ 19. (C) Comment: We generally agree with Adilov's observations. It should also be noted that while some of the women prosecuted on religious extremism charges were imprisoned, they generally received shorter sentences than men who have been convicted of the same charges, while other women were given suspended sentences. In general, the Uzbek legal system is more forgiving of women who are convicted of crimes than men. End comment.

SIX MEN INDICTED FOR MEMBERSHIP IN "WAHABBI" GROUP

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¶ 10. (U) According to court documents, on October 18, 2008, the TASHKENT 00000497 003 OF 004

Tashkent City Prosecutor S. Alayev indicted six men - Gulomjon Zakirov, Murodjon Gapirov, Saidakmol Ishanbayev, Nodirjon Muhammadsaid, Kamoliddin Akhundjanov, and Hojiakbar Sahdiyev - for alleged membership in an extremist "Wahabbi" group. In 1997, Zakirov was allegedly recruited by Imam Obid Nazarov into an organization named "Sebzor Jamoat," reportedly a "Wahabbi" religious extremist group and branch of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) that was created by imams Abidkhan Nazarov, Rukhiddin Fakhruddinov, and Abduvali Mirzaev. Zakirov then reportedly recruited the other men (all age 26 to 29) into the group. Their current fate is unknown. The indictment was signed by Tashkent City Interior Ministry Investigator S. Tadzhibayev and Tashkent City Interior Ministry Chief of Investigative Department Major D. Mirsodikov.

¶ 11. (U) Over the years, the government has frequently used the term "Wahhabi" to describe alleged followers of either Imam Abduvali Mirzaev of Andijon, who disappeared in 1995, or Imam Abidkhan Nazarov of Tashkent, who fled to Kazakhstan in 1998 to avoid arrest and was granted refugee status by the UN High Commission for Refugees and relocated to Europe in 2006. Imam Rukhiddin Fakhruddinov, an alleged follower of Nazarov, was convicted of religious extremism and terrorism in connection with the 2004 terrorist bombings in Tashkent and Bukhara and sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment.

EIGHT SUSPECTED IMU MEMBERS IMPRISONED IN TASHKENT

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¶ 12. (U) On March 12, the Russian news agency Interfax reported that the Tashkent City Criminal Court sentenced eight men to five years' imprisonment each on religious extremism charges. The men (age 27 to 44) lived in the same neighborhood and were allegedly members of an "illegal group" led by Bakhtiyor Shukrullayev that was linked to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Starting about 10 years ago, the men allegedly met Shukhrullayev at a local mosque, who claimed to be an Islamic expert and indoctrinated them in extremist ideology. Shukhrullayev was earlier arrested in 2007.

UPDATE ON "NUR" CASES

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¶13. (U) A government crackdown continues against suspected members of "Nur," a banned conservative (but not extremist) religious organization associated with Turkish scholar Fethullah Gullen. On April 10, Radio Free Europe's Uzbek-language Ozodlik.org website reported that the Tashkent City Court had recently announced the verdict against three individuals associated with the "Yeti Iqlim" newspaper (ref C). Two employees at the paper - journalist Davron Tojiev and distributor Sahvat Ismoilov - were sentenced to eight years' imprisonment, while Namangan-based imam Mamadali Shahobiddinov received 12 years' imprisonment.

¶14. (U) The independent Harakat.net website reported that on April  
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1 the Tashkent City Criminal Court rejected the appeal of five individuals associated with the "Irmoq" magazine - including Abdulaziz Dadahanov, a UGRAD (university-level U.S. exchange program) alumnus who studied in Connecticut - who were convicted of Nur membership and received 8 to 12-year prison terms in February (ref C). On April 9, Harakat.net also reported that five additional individuals had been arrested on suspicion of Nur membership - Ibrohim Khudoyberganov, Tal'at Pulatov, Jahongir Qurbonov, and one unnamed "religious person."

COMMENT

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¶15. (C) While there appeared to be a leveling off in the sheer number of religious extremism trials over the past year, these cases highlight that such still trials continue at some level. This may be part of the general crackdown on independent Muslims groups which has been ongoing (with periodic waxing and waning) since the late 1990s. We remain concerned that religious extremist suspects frequently are abused in custody and denied due process. Of the cases reported above, the only one in which we have received specific allegations of abuse is that of Shakhlo Sultanova, though it is possible (but we cannot confirm) that the other defendants were abused. In the cases of the suspected Nur members, we are concerned that authorities are imprisoning suspected members of a conservative - but not extremist - religious organization. We also continue to worry that Uzbek prisons, where large numbers of suspected religious prisoners continue to be held, could serve as breeding grounds of extremism.

BUTCHER